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## A Perspective on the Historical Epistemology of Social Work Education

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### Abstract

*Social work has used several paradigms to guide its educational knowledge base. The writings, beliefs, and perceptions of three of social work's founders who have greatly influenced the history of social work education—Jane Addams, Mary Richmond, Edith Abbott—are examined here. This article seeks to explore the constructs and knowledge base of social work from this historical perspective. Specifically, it presents a discussion on the sources of knowledge developed in social work, explores the relationship between epistemology and research, discusses the historical context of the knowledge base, and concludes with some recommendations for social work education.*

**Keywords:** social work, history, epistemology, education, research

This article explores the constructs and knowledge base of social work. Specifically, the source of knowledge developed in social work is examined and the relationships among epistemology, research, and social work are discussed in an historical context, concluding with recommendations.

### The Sources of Knowledge

For the purpose of this exploration, Greene's (1990) work identifying three sources of knowledge- (a) historical ideologies, (b) meaning given to ideologies, and (c) concrete claims resulting from the synthesis- is used as the platform. For the identification of social work education, we deconstruct the knowledge claims from our historical actors and the meaning they gave to that knowledge and try to define the intention of the primary actors in the profession's creation and knowledge base. The result from this synthesis is the acquisition of knowledge claims used to build the body of specialized knowledge asserted as the premise for social work's academic, social, and contextual stance.

### Historical Ideologies of Social Work Founders – Three Women

In the determination of social work knowledge, several paradigms help to guide the current and historical knowledge base. For instance, some scholars espouse it was a triad heritage resulting from the works of Jane Addams, Mary Richmond, and Edith Abbott which led to the rich history of social work education (Agnew, 2004; Brieland, 1990; Costin, 1983; Feldman & Kamerman, 2001; Franklin, 1986; Wisner, 1958).

Historically Jane Addams has been known as the chief founder of the Hull House Settlement Movement. Her philosophy was to serve the poor and the needy within the community of Chicago. More specifically, Addams' ideology was more of practical activism; she refused to use an impersonal approach with the people she served (Brieland, 1990). She instead surrounded herself with the people she served; she lived in the neighborhood. According to Franklin (1986), Addams did not refer to her neighbors as clients or cases. Consequently, Addams disregarded the younger social workers who served the needy with an eight-hour day in the community but resided in homes which were far from the slums and poor (Brieland, 1990).

Another key historical character was Mary Richmond. Richmond was a clerk who rose to the rank of General Secretary in the Charity Organization Society (COS) (Frankin, 1986). The COS approach for responding to the poor and needy was through “friendly visitors” versus Addams’ approach, which was much more personal. Richmond contended with Addams’ approach and the mission of the Hull Settlement House. She condemned their service as an old-fashioned mission which provided cheap charity. Brieland (1990) argued that Richmond approached her mission as a gatekeeper for the welfare system rather than truly caring for the needs of the poor and destitute. Richmond assessed who constituted the deserving poor by examining characteristics of those who were seeking help, which contrasted with Addams’ socialization as a means of helping. Despite Richmond’s approach leading to the case management of social work, she was later criticized for excluding some of the deserving poor (Brieland, 1990).

Most studies on the progression of social work education have examined the dynamics between the aforementioned two women, Jane Addams and Mary Richmond. However, there is one other influential woman discussed intermittently in the body of literature, Edith Abbott. Abbott was interested in the academic program of social work and joined the faculty at the Chicago School of Civics and Philanthropy with the intent to incorporate social research into the curricula (Brieland, 1990). She seized the opportunity to observe the Hull Settlement House when she moved to Chicago and was instrumental in the formation and definition of social work education (Brieland, 1990; Costin, 1983). Abbott argued that social work education needed to embody several fields of study, and proposed social experimentation as integral to this body of knowledge (Wisner, 1960).

However, the body of knowledge rested also on the influences of these historical women in social work. Influences of Addams’ peaceful intellectual activist approach, Richmond’s casework ideology and her involvement in COS, and Abbott’s influence in political science persisted in the shaping of the social work profession. Addams remained influential in the curriculum of social education but opted not to become a member of the faculty in the school of social work. Richmond argued that universities and colleges should not impede the practical training of social work over theory and academics (Agnew, 2004; Costin, 1983). Abbott’s quest was to integrate a research emphasis in social work education and to make the profession similar to other disciplines (Shoemaker, 1998). Although the opposing paradigms existed between Richmond and Abbott, the challenge for the social work profession was finding a place in academia -- an arena dominated primarily by males (Costin, 1983). Abbott’s intellectual stance allowed her the confidence to insist that social work be considered a social science. All three women came from distinctly different academic and social backgrounds. Addams was a first-generation college woman and came from a wealthy family. Richmond was a high school graduate and an orphan who was raised in poverty by her grandmother. Edith Abbott, having been educated in England, went on to receive a doctorate in political economy. She was considered to be highly intelligent and an elitist (Brieland, 1990; Costin, 1983; Shoemaker, 1998). In addition to the significance and influences on social work education by the key actors, it is imperative that a social context be set to ground their ideologies. Specifically, during the time of Jane Addams (1860-1935) there were numerous political and social activism such as a call for human right issues, female suffrage, civil liberties, social and economic justice (Reichert, 2011; Steen, 2006; Zinn, 2003). More specifically, Steen (2006) writes that Addams’ influence on the social context of her time led to human rights as an all-encompassing social work curriculum, and its core values such as dignity or human worth and social justice were

established. Yet, this is very different from Richmond (1861-1928) whose context was driven by the need for practical experiences, assessment and evidence, and accountability for work with clients – setting rules for predicting experiences (Festenstein, 2009). The social context of Abbott's influence seemed to rest on the need for more than just practical experiences and a call for justice. There was a call for scientific and academic education to aid policy reform (Shoemaker, 1998). The dialogue about each in the social work literature demonstrates their conflicting ideologies (Brieland, 1990; Franklin, 1986) and their influence on the epistemology of social work.

### **Epistemology of Social Work Education**

With science widely accepted as a knowledge-producer and epistemology basically a deconstructor of knowledge layers, any effort to recognize the social determinants of science may be considered a common construction of epistemology. This discussion on epistemology is categorized as defining knowledge, acquiring knowledge, and knowing and assessing knowledge.

#### **Defining social work knowledge**

Through the examination of the work of these three primary actors, we present an initial list of defined sources for social work knowledge. The list is not exhaustive but highlights the main areas of knowledge in the literature. Sources of social work knowledge include:

- Information about groups,
- Knowledge of social problems and disabilities,
- Personal experiences and beliefs about personal experiences,
- Knowledge of human behavior,
- Information on understanding the individual and family life,
- Discussions on the effect of mind upon mind,
- Information on the theory of the wider self,
- Knowledge of how to eliminate imperfect thought about creating autonomy from oppression and domination,
- Information on how to overcome the *bourgeois* ideology,
- Discussions of advocacy and charity,
- Information on creating a society that satisfies the needs and power of both political and social actors,
- Knowledge of how to interpret and to intervene in changing a society,
- Critical science to provide moral and social criticism,
- Ways to liberate and create autonomy for the disadvantaged in society,
- Knowledge of the systematic process in which practitioners gathered facts, made hypotheses, and revised them in the light of additional facts from individual cases

(Agnew, 2004; Feldman & Kamerman, 2001; Greene, 1990; Stuart & Reid, 2001; Woodroffe, 1962).

Outlining sources of social work knowledge provided a lens to view the accumulation of knowledge and assessment of the social work knowledge claims. Although questions remain as to what constitute justifiable scientific knowledge in social work (Greene, 1990), the next step is to establish how social work knowledge has been acquired.

## **Acquiring social work knowledge**

Social work knowledge has been acquired through many avenues. For instance, during its first seven years, the social work school curriculum in New York was a combination of lectures, readings, assignments, field work, and opportunities for research (Agnew, 2004). A close reading of the literature about the creation of social work standards also describe research methods and topics of inquiry relevant for researchers in the social and behavioral sciences (Brieland, 1990; Stuart & Reid, 2001). Methods to acquire social work knowledge included surveys, interviews, focus groups, oral history, participant observation, observations of public behavior, and the analysis of existing data. Topics included research perception, motivation, cognition, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior (Hepworth, Rooney, Rooney & Strom-Gottfried, 2006).

Knowledge was acquired inside and outside the classroom through direct and indirect sources. The field work component relied on knowledge from practitioners and visiting lecturers (Wisner, 1958). Lectures were initially held in agencies and disseminated the guidance for practice as well as gleaned information to improve services (Shoemaker, 1998). Readings and assignments were influenced by other social science theories (Costin, 1983). In addition, Stuart and Reid (2001) asserted that social workers extracted general scientific knowledge from research studies conducted by sociology and psychology scholars. Social workers used the findings from these research studies to assess social problems and to embark on intervention methods in the profession. However, social workers were assumed to be incapable of carrying out their own scientific inquiries because they were not trained to do so (Stuart & Reid, 2001).

This assumption implied a lack of emphasis on research knowledge in the early curriculum. As social work education grew, a lack of scientific and research training persisted in schools of social work, a situation that posed concerns. The ongoing argument against research as part of the social work curricula in universities was that social work students were not likely to use research skills upon graduating (Howard, Allen-Meares, & Ruffolo, 2007). Sadly, even today the discussion continues on online social work Listservs. Despite many of the skills used in the professional practice of social work, research knowledge is still viewed as not effectively taught. Several social work educators believed that this is due to a lack of homogeneity in social work research pedagogy (Howard et al., 2007; Knee, 2002; Tripodi, 1974). This also posed a concern as we tried to examine how the knowledge gained in social work was recognized and assessed.

## **Identifying current problems of social work education**

The current problems of social work education--the place of research and theory for practice in social work -- have emerged from its complex formation and history. First theory in social work is a controversial theme fostering a debate; one side vying for theory-free and the other vying for theory in practice as a necessity for organizing research and relationships (Lam, 2004; Simon, 1994; Thyer, 2001). Researchers like, Thyer (2001) argues that "it is neither essential nor necessarily desirable for research on social work practice to be theoretically driven" (p.22). Yet others like Simon (1994) suggest that "theory is a conceptual screen that helps social workers sort quickly through masses of data for salient informational cues to action" (p.144). Second, the historical dissention on the relevance of research in particular, rested on the stance and ideology of key social work actors. For instance, Epstein (1987) contended that no other part of the social work curriculum has been so unswervingly "received by students with as much

groaning, moaning, eye-rolling, hyperventilation, and waiver strategizing as the research course” (p. 71). As such there have been attempts to tease out this part of the curriculum and its relevance. In 2001, in their study Green, Bretzin and Leininger found a significant level of anxiety related to research in social work students in comparison to students from other disciplines, namely psychology and business. In fact some scholars fear that because of uninterested student attitudes there may be a direct translation to a lack of competence in applying research presumable resulting from practitioners’ failure to prioritize and effectively integrate research in social work curriculum (Epstein, 1987; Green, et al., 2001; Howard, et al., 2007). Although both subjects are represented in the current curriculum the historical stance helps to explain the contention and on-going debate.

### **Development of social work curriculum and philosophies at play**

With an understanding of how social work curriculums were developed and how social workers were trained, it still seemed unclear how the knowledge set and knowledge assessments were conducted. In fact it was hard to determine what counted as appropriate for social work knowledge and thus even harder to recognize. In reviews of Wisner’s (1958) writings he noted that 12 years after the start of the New York Charity Organization Society (COS) Summer School in 1915, only five cities had schools of social work: New York, Chicago, Boston, Philadelphia, and St. Louis, none of which had any significant university affiliation at that time. The first classes of social work were held in summer school (June 20–July 30). The lecturers were leaders of charity departments and organizations, public officials, and university faculty from other cities who joined in this historical period in social work education (Feldman & Kamerman, 2001). At the first class in the New York Charity Organization Society Summer School, 27 graduate students were in attendance. The students’ tuition was \$10 (Feldman & Kamerman, 2001). This brief review showed that there was some anticipation that the knowledge would be recognized if it were affiliated with a university, sessions were longer than one month, faculty were trained in the profession, and there was a higher cost for the services.

Although several factors contributed to the slow integration of universities affiliated with social work education, one of the main factors was the universities’ lack of acceptance of social work as a discipline. In fact the claim dates back to Abraham Flexner’s 1915 proclamation stating that social work was not a profession but merely a handmaiden of related enterprises (Flexner, 2001). Even in 1979, Austin contended that social work was not a discipline as it failed to provide a knowledge claim which had rigor and scientific premise as did other disciplines. More recently, critics of social work education, such as Gambrill’s appeal for a thorough review of the social work curriculum as being timely, and Howard, Allen-Meares and Ruffolo’s (2007) dissention that some of the social work educational paradigms and models have outlived their purpose (cited Jenson, 2007). It is in recognition of these past disclaimers that led to historical inquiries for changes in the social work curriculum which demonstrates the infusion of topic similar in other professions, such as in theories and research to create a progression toward pedagogical uniformity (Knee, 2002; Howard, Allen-Meares & Ruffolo, 2007).

Another concern, regarding the historical construct of social work education originating in Flexner 1915 assertion was that the social work profession was branded as a profession for women (Shoemaker, 1998). This may be because in the early development of social work education, programs were unstructured and taught by a diverse cadre of lecturers from different disciplines (Feldman & Kamerman, 2001) across different geographic location. This emergence of schools of social work, in varied geographic locations, accounted for the large variability in

the formation of the curriculum. Aspects of this are still evident and exist in how social work is taught. In fact, the dissimilarity of social work education in the geographic location is attributed to and connected to the philosophical perspective of the location of leaders who influenced the curriculum (Franklin, 1986; Shoemaker, 1998).

Between 1911 and 1912, attempts were made to improve the level of training that students received at the New York School of Social Work by mandating that students complete a second year of applied study in an approved agency (Agnew, 2004). This initiative was well received by Edward Devine, founder and director of the New York School of Philanthropy, who introduced a new curriculum upon his return from a 5-year hiatus. This shift in the curriculum was articulated by the historian Elizabeth Mier who wrote that the social idealism gave rise to practicality (Agnew, 2004). The result was a reduction in the courses in economics, social forces, and social legislation to less than one-half of the school's curriculum and Devine hired practitioners rather than university men to serve as the full-time faculty.

Richmond's and Devine's approaches to restructuring the curriculum and faculty hiring aligned with the pedagogical convictions of a pragmatic philosophy such as that of Dewey and James (Shoemaker, 1998). Although this paradigm shift toward pragmatic or experiential learning while remaining cautious about academia's influence was not entirely embraced, Philip Ayers of the New York Summer School in Philanthropic Work contended that universities only "prepare, but do not train" (Agnew, 2004, p. 147). Yet it was believed that those who advocated for Richmond's pragmatic ideological approach wanted to preserve the social work profession's self-determination as they debated social work's place in academic social sciences.

Conversely, Abbott, in her curriculum planning at the School of Social Work in Chicago, focused on a broad professional preparation rather than on narrow specialization for just a particular agency setting (Wisner, 1960). For example, she felt that the knowledge disseminated in the school of social work must exemplify both cultural and disciplinary subjects in their own rights. Abbott advocated for an emphasis on scientific knowledge for and by those who were concerned with the development of social services and policies that would improve the lives of those served. She refuted the notion that preparation for the field of social work should be delegated to others who are in an inferior position within academia.

In 1920, Abbott proposed to the Chicago School of Social Work six domains which she claimed offered justifiable knowledge for social work education: (a) the field of social treatment, (b) public welfare administration, (c) social research and social statistics, (d) the field of law and government in relation to social welfare, (e) social economics and social politics including social insurance, and (f) the history of social experimentation (Wisner, 1958). Although Abbott's main focus was the academic emphasis on social work education, she expressed interest in the practical aspects of social work education as well (Wisner, 1960). Abbott stated that the subject of social experimentation was tremendously relevant and needed to be incorporated into the teaching content of social work (Wisner, 1960). She argued that "this subject is of great importance because experiments involving the lives of human beings are very costly and ought never to be unnecessarily repeated" (Wisner, 1960, p. 266). Moreover, Abbott claimed that building on the knowledge of the past would only enable the profession to advance and not slide backward. Abbott was very optimistic about the future of social work education in academia. She felt hopeful about the potential for the schools of social work to transition from what she considered limited vocational training to adequate standards of graduate preparation under university sponsorship. In 1931, Abbott contended that "the failure in the past to apply scientific

method and scientific leadership to the needs of the poor wasted the taxpayers' money and left behind a trail of good intentions and futile efforts” (Dunlap, 1993, p. 293).

Abbot emphasized that social work field work must consist of more than field trips and observations. She contended that students must be active participants in the practice of social work (Wisner, 1960). In 1928, Abbott argued that students were too often “farmed-out” to social services agencies without adequate supervision. She advocated for field instructors to be employed as full-time faculty members to help solve the problem of inadequate supervision. Abbott wanted to ensure that the knowledge claims of social work remained consistent, and she stated that with field instructors becoming more connected to academia; they would provide an integrated learning experience for the social work students (Wisner, 1960).

Still, the curriculum was not structured, explicit nor standard, but reflected the values of the founders. For instance, Richmond argued against including extensive academic coursework in the curriculum. Her emancipatory interest was a critical factor in shaping the orientation of social work as a profession. Her ideology was that social work knowledge was an instrument of action, included an understanding of human behavior, and reflected both knowledge and evaluation of individual and family life (Woodroffe, 1962). Some scholars in the literature referred to Richmond as the most influential person in the history of social work as a profession (Agnew, 2004; Feldman & Kamerman, 2001; Woodroffe, 1962), but Jane Addams and Edith Abbott were contributors and founders about the purpose of the profession. Addams’ human rights advocacy is embedded in the core values of social work education and practice. More specifically, The National Association of Social Work Code of Ethic by which is the benchmark of social work curriculum encompassed human right practice. Also, Addams early human right activism represents a humanist generalist approach by which several social work foundation course follows. Addams community advocacy within community-based practice is reflected in social work curriculums specifically in the individuals and families in the context of the larger social environments that they inhabit (Kondrat, 2001).

Abbott’s pursuit to integrate social work as a science led to not only the inclusion of research in the curriculum but endeavors to compete on similar spheres as other disciplines (Steen, 2006). Social work education has incorporated research based courses which allow students to conduct empirically based studies. As such, one can credits Abbott’s fight for a social work curriculum to include research and for fostering the research resistance dialogue in the profession (Steen, 2006) resulting in the noted historical dissention today. Thus, it was through this interactive historical context that we began to recognize and to assess what would be counted as social work knowledge and to frame the first curriculum of social work education.

### **Assessing social work knowledge**

The three historical scholars considered critical science as a lens through which to view traditional research assessment—an approach not necessarily involving inquiry into the key social actors’ interpretations—versus research that concentrates on those interpretations that cannot be ignored. From the latter perspective, it was considered more appropriate for knowledge to be manipulated, publicized, taught, and shared. Thus, when knowledge is acquired and used, the basis for assessment should rely heavily on the research grounding the actors’ thought (Greene, 1990). The result was the integration of many courses to make up the first school of social work that resembles what is available today.

Specifically, according to Wisner (1958), courses in philanthropy and methods of social investigation teaching materials were where social work education could be found and assessed. In fact, even the on-the-ground work of Mary Richmond, in her analysis of the underlying philosophy of social work, suggested that social work knowledge and its assessment could come from questionnaires as a means of collecting information about groups with various social problems and disabilities (Woodroffe, 1962). Richmond and her followers also believed that social work knowledge could be found in the systematic process by which practitioners gathered facts, made hypotheses, and revised them in light of additional facts from individual cases (Stuart & Reid, 2001). Richmond's pragmatic approach to understanding social phenomena was evident in her drive to exclude intensive academic courses from the social work education curriculum. Agnew (2004) argues that Richmond was committed to a pragmatic epistemology focusing on personal experience rather than on an abstract rationale as a source of knowledge. Richmond's ideology was influenced by both pragmatic philosophers such as John Dewey and William James (Festenstein, 2009).

The literature showed that early leaders believed social work knowledge could be found and assessed through fieldwork but not through the scientific investigation of fundamental social welfare policy issues conducted through university-based research and coursework (Dunlap, 1993). In the end, when one considers the knowledge base construction for social work they may derive that the historical founder's use of the *friendly visitors* are still present.

### **Summary Social Work Education and Where We Are Today**

In summary, social work education has a rich history that frames what it was and what it is today. Albeit a blurred line between social work education and social work research — no indication of professional underdevelopment (Lorenz, 2012). The terms are often used interchangeably in the literature but a distinction must be made. Social work education is often referred to as the disseminating of the social work knowledgebase. Social work research on the other hand is referred to as the process of making and developing hypotheses and conducting inquiries to gather evidence and propose explanations about work conducted in social work (Gibbs & Gambrill, 1998). Today, both subjects are effectively interwoven into and distinctly present in the curriculum responding to calls from the early leaders.

For instance, Feldman and Kamerman (2001) asserted that national leaders and agencies' leaders were in constant dialogue, seeking ways to address the growing phenomena of the purpose of social work after the Civil War. The writings of Anna L. Dawes in 1893 and Mary Richmond in 1897 illustrate the enormity of the discussion of social problems, social reform, and the need to create a formal institution to prepare reformers and home visitors. At that time no formal schools or colleges provided training for friendly visitors; they were trained within the agencies by visiting lecturers from the university and community leaders.

In 1865 we saw the formation of the American Social Science Association. This later evolved into the National Conference of Charities and Corrections in 1874 (Feldman & Kamerman, 2001). Subsequently, in the aftermath of the Civil War there was an increase in the number of staff in the State Boards of Charities and Corrections. This increase led to the escalation of paid staff for agency administration or what was known as "friendly visiting" in the Associations for Improving the Conditions of Poor (AICPs), Charity Organization Societies (COSs), Children's Aid Societies, the State Children's Home Societies, and the sectarian family



agencies, which increased the need for more workers (Feldman & Kamerman, 2001). The friendly visiting encompassed the dutiful advocacy for and empathy with poor families' plights and welfare. Feldman and Kamerman (2001) inferred that there was an emerging need for recruitment of reformers and friendly visitors to meet the rising need in the post-Civil War period. He stated that reformers and friendly visitors both needed knowledge. As a result of political and social changes, different and unique social problems were being manifested in society beyond the scope and capacity of the current charitable and corrections staff but collaborations were brewing.

One such emergent, collaborative effort to address the need for workers was in professionalizing or constructing the knowledge base of the friendly visitors/social work. Feldman and Kamerman (2001) pointed to the divide in the ideological stance between 'professional method and community sensibilities' (p. 379). More specifically, the emerging social phenomena in 1897, the shift in paradigm of charitable organizations' ability to address the social problems, required an accumulation of a knowledge base on patterns of relationships. Much of this knowledge was thought to be achieved through the saturation of courses over the curriculum to prepare students for work in the profession (Holloway, et al., 2008). This is not the case today, however as there is "no longer a mandate for academic content and the expectations have been loosen regarding curriculum form and structure" (Holloway, et al., 2008, p.1).

Because knowledge of the past often educate current work, through the exploration of the historical epistemology of social work it is clear to see how content in the curriculum was driven to the point of overload. As persons and influences changed in social work education so did the curriculum swell to a point where it was hard to teach all that was expected. As such the driving force in social work education curriculum today, Council on Social Work Education (CSWE), noted this constant swell and authored a change to competency based education (Holloway, Black, Hoffman, & Pierce, 2008). The result was what is now considered the common epistemologies of social work education or the ten outcome competencies expected from students and practitioners:

1. Professional use of self
2. Ethics and ethical decision making
3. Critical thinking
4. Diversity
5. Human rights
6. Research informed practice and practice informed research
7. Human Behavior
8. Policy Practice
9. Response to Context
10. Engagement, Assessment, Intervention, and Evaluation (Holloway, et al., 2008, p.9).

We can only be hopeful that this shift for the future will value the work of the past, the influences of the founders, and the purposes of the historical creation and context of the profession. And that the shift to competency can move us forward on the on-going debates on theory and research relevance and of being a viable profession like all the other disciplines.

## Next step recommendations

We offer a few recommendations to support this move forward from where we have been. First, the key historical actors examined herein recommended that we remember to continually examine where we are heading and what we want to achieve as a profession. Abbott specifically reminds us that research does have a place. It can rise to the same level of research skills as other social science fields. The debate must end; we must now make it happen.

The second recommendation is to examine whether some advocacies of the past are worth revisiting. For instance, Richmond, who was very active in formulating the structure of the curriculum, advocated for the development of professional standards based on the widespread knowledge fundamental to charitable work. She proposed a social work training school located in a large city with direct access to philanthropic agencies; that practical work for college or university students was needed; and association with the university should not impede the emphasis on social work training over theory and academic requirements (Costlin, 1998). The Chicago School did not support Richmond's curricular proposals and instead developed an academic curriculum (Franklin, 1986). Abbott and her supporters developed a social work education curriculum based on social theory with an analytic and reform orientation that emphasized social policy and social philosophy. The differences in educational backgrounds were apparent, with Abbott's doctorate contrasting with Richmond's limited higher education exposure. Evidently these two opposing paradigms influenced and continue to influence social work education and curricula. We do not question who was right, but whether the discussion is still relevant today to ensure the grounding of the profession.

## Conclusion

Clearly, any attempt to fully assess the historical epistemology of social work education lies beyond the scope of this article. Hence this analysis and evaluation of the historical epistemology of social work education in no way claims to be conclusive in the length and breadth of such a rich history. The authors are humbled by the opportunity to revisit the history of the social work profession ingression into academia. The magnitude of advocacy that took place as social work education progressed as a discipline was daunting. Clearly, the premise of social work epistemology has undertaken several paradigm shifts since its inception in the 1890s. As a result, the profession has earned its status among those disciplines that have withstood the rigor of finding a place in academia.

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